

Swim Shops Guide to Open Water Swimming

For most people participating in the CB&I Triathlon, the swim is the toughest, if not scariest, part of the day. It's the weakest event for the overwhelming majority of the 1,000 participants. While time spent training in a pool will go a long way in making your day a success, you will find that there is a significant difference between swimming in a pool versus a lake. Here are a few tips to get you around the buoys:

- **Give yourself room at the start.** At the start of the race, which is always a scary moment, try and relax and stay clear of the area where people are crowding for position. It is not worth the fight to be a few feet closer to the start buoy. For example, if you are at the start and the distance to the first turn buoy is 100 meters, moving five meters to the outside at the start (thereby avoiding the crowd and the fighting) will only have you swimming about two extra feet. (Assuming you swim in a straight line!) So it pays to stay to the outside and away from the congestion.
- Lake Woodlands is muddy. We live in Southeastern Texas and silty/muddy water is a fact of life. Many athletes will experience a bit of anxiety because of all the swimmers around them and their inability to see underwater. The first thing you need to do is relax and breathe. Don't let your mind turn this into an issue. Swimming the course at the practice swim will give you a dry run of the anxiety you may experience on race day. If you find yourself starting to worry or panic, lift your head out of the water and get your bearings. Then roll over on your back and relax if it continues. Anxiety attacks are very common in the first 100 yards, so don't feel like you're the only one experiencing this. If you feel you need help, look for and wave to the lifeguards stationed in the water or the edge of the lake. Most of Lake Woodlands is shallow and the edges of the lake are paved, so you will find some footing relatively quickly if you swim for the shoreline. The swim can be the scariest part of the race, so take the proper steps so that you're prepared.
- Scope the course. Line yourself up behind the first buoys, in line with how you intend to swim during the race. Try to find a landmark (telephone pole, bridge, house, building, etc) that you can sight off of in case you cannot find a buoy when you are swimming in the race. Sometimes it can be hidden behind a group of swimmers or blocked by the glaring sun. Do this with as many buoys as you can on the course. I've found that the cell phone tower south of the lake can be a great landmark to sight off of, as well as the orange sculpture on Lake Woodlands. It helps keep you on course in case you lose your bearings with the buoys. Also, be sure to do this for the finish as well. Line yourself up looking at the swim finish from the last turn buoy, then look around for a large landmark. Often the "Swim Finish" banner is good enough, but pay attention to which side of the docks the finish is on. Backtracking to get back on course is never fun.

Good Luck!